

University of Pennsylvania:

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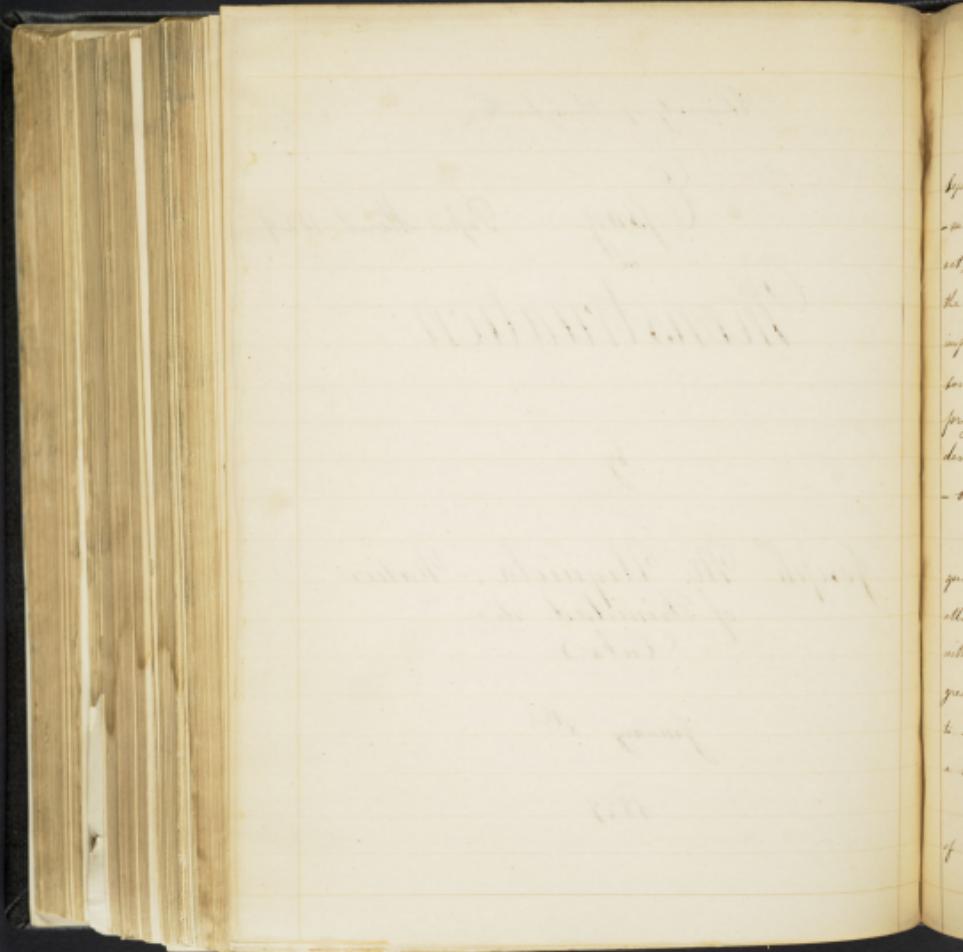
Menstruation

by

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of Trinidad de
Cuba

January 8th

1829

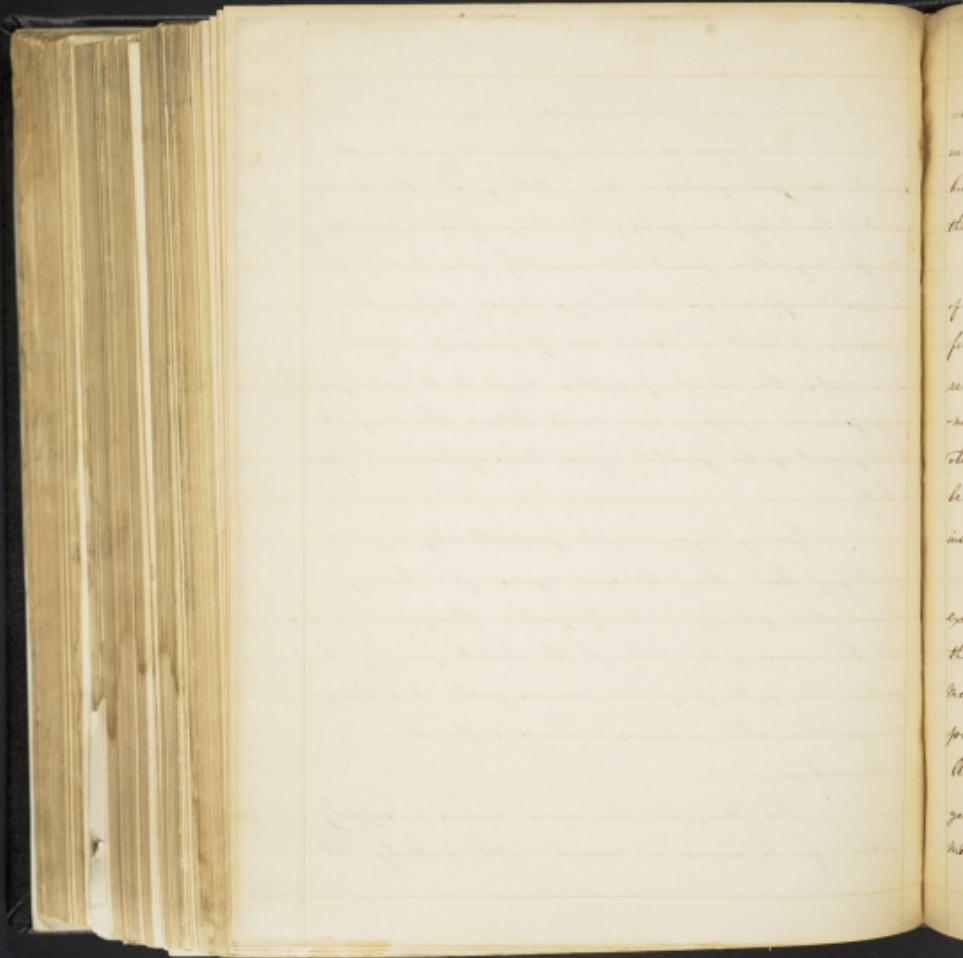


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Each organ of our body performs its function at
separate successive periods - Thus, setting aside the develop-
ment of the Ovaries and Testes, the lungs first begin to
act, performing their function immediately after birth; then
the digestive apparatus - Some days elapse before the
impressions of light and sound are perceived - After
some weeks the moral faculties begin to be developed;
respiration and excretion occur much later - The complete
development of the genital organs takes place at pu-
berty.

Growing organs require proportionately a greater
quantity of blood than the same organs after having
attained their full size - The proportion therefore diminishes
with the increase of size, although the absolute quantity be
greater; and if the proportion remains greater it is owing
to an irritation, which in various tumours is often relieved by
a haemorrhage.

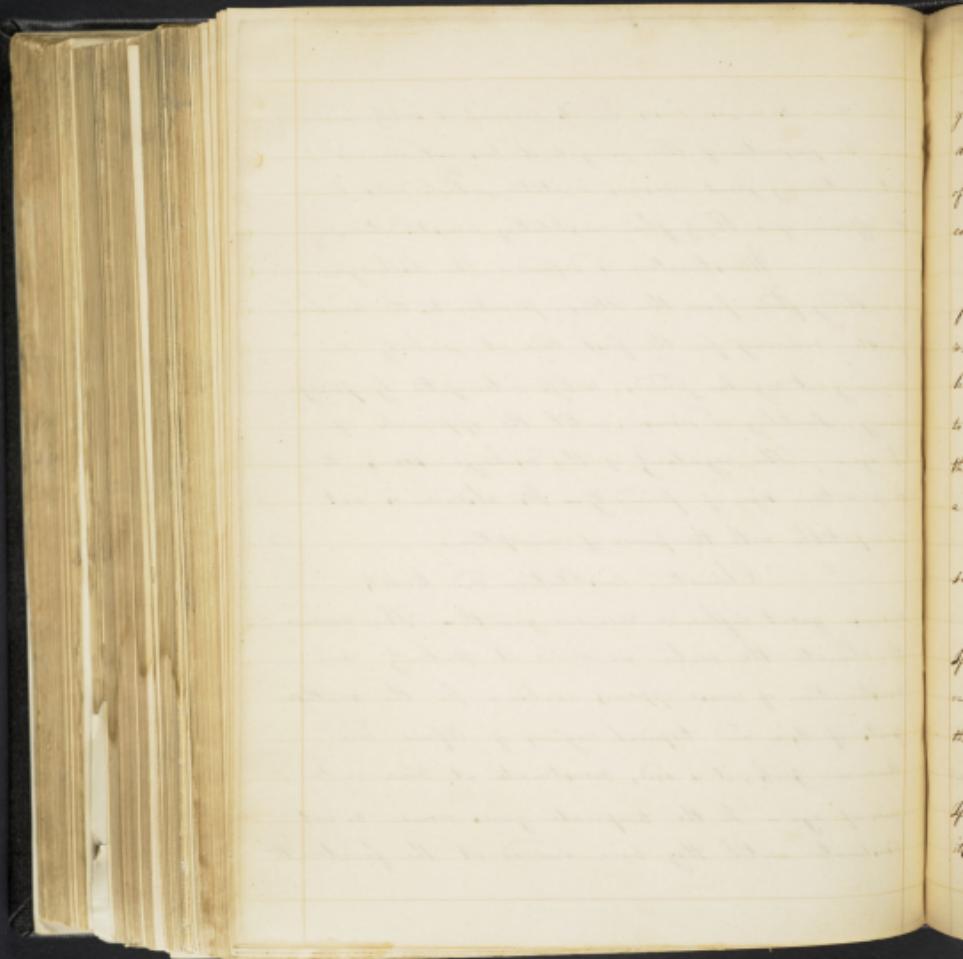
The Stomach, like other organs, receives a supply
of blood for its increase and renewal until puberty, at



which time its increase ceases and its removal is solely carried on - The proportion of blood going to it does not diminish, but continuing great occasions irritation, which ends in the effusion of a bloody fluid constituting menstruation.

Menstruation is defined - The discharge of a bloody fluid from the uterus, peculiar to the human female, occurring for the first time at puberty and recurring at regular periods, unless interrupted by pregnancy, lactation or disease, until the approach of the age. The regularity of the discharge seems to be a certain sign of femininity - Its absence is not incompatible with the power of conception.

Climate, constitution and habits exercise great influence over our growth - The warmer the climate the earlier we arrive at puberty and menstruation of course appears earlier - In the southern parts of Asia and tropical regions of Africa and America, girls, it is said, menstruate at nine or ten years of age - In the temperate zones women do not menstruate until they have arrived at the fourteenth



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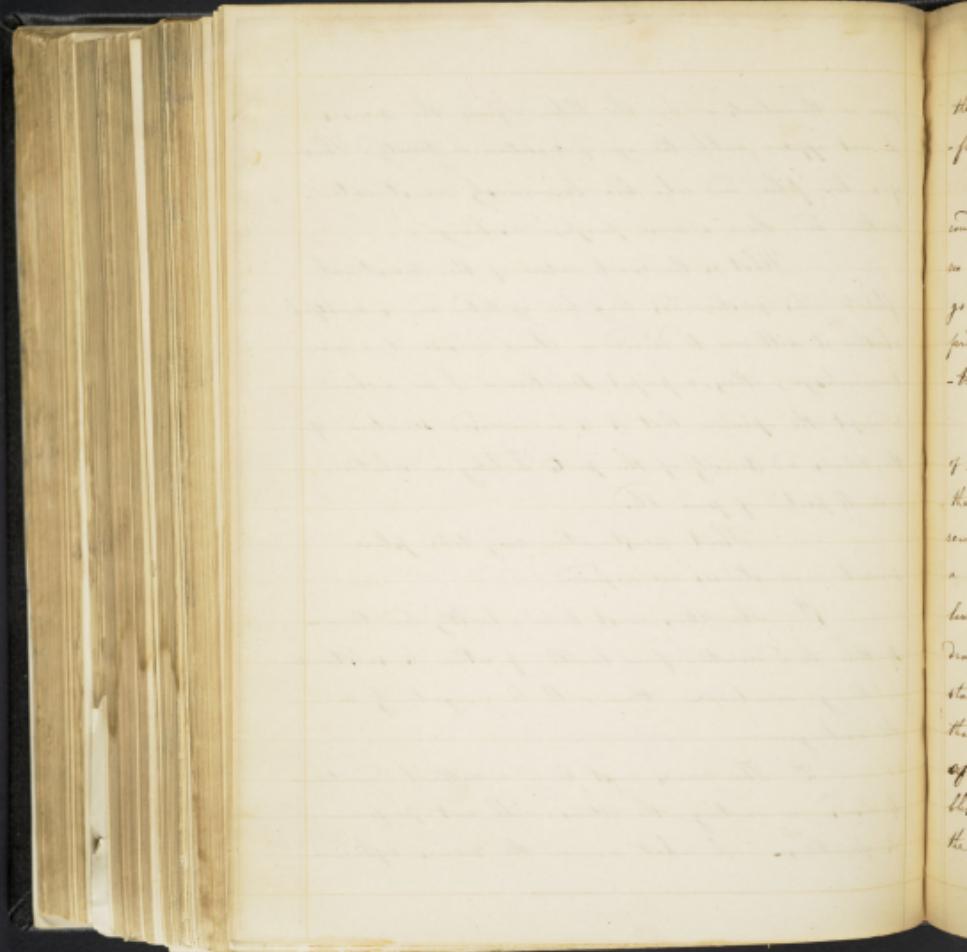
year or thereabouts - In the Polar regions the menses do not appear until the age of eighteen or twenty. Those of a lax fibre and who live luxuriously menstruate earlier and have a more profuse discharge.

What is the exact nature of the menstrual fluid? This question has long been agitated and is doubtful whether it will ever be decided - Some consider it a mere haemorrhage; others, a perfect secretion - I am inclined to adopt the opinion that it is an increased secretion of the menses and density of the parts holding in solution a small portion of pure blood.

That menstruation may take place several circumstances are required

1^o The Uterus must be in a healthy condition - If there be a deviation from health of either its substance or lining membrane, there will be irregularity in the discharge

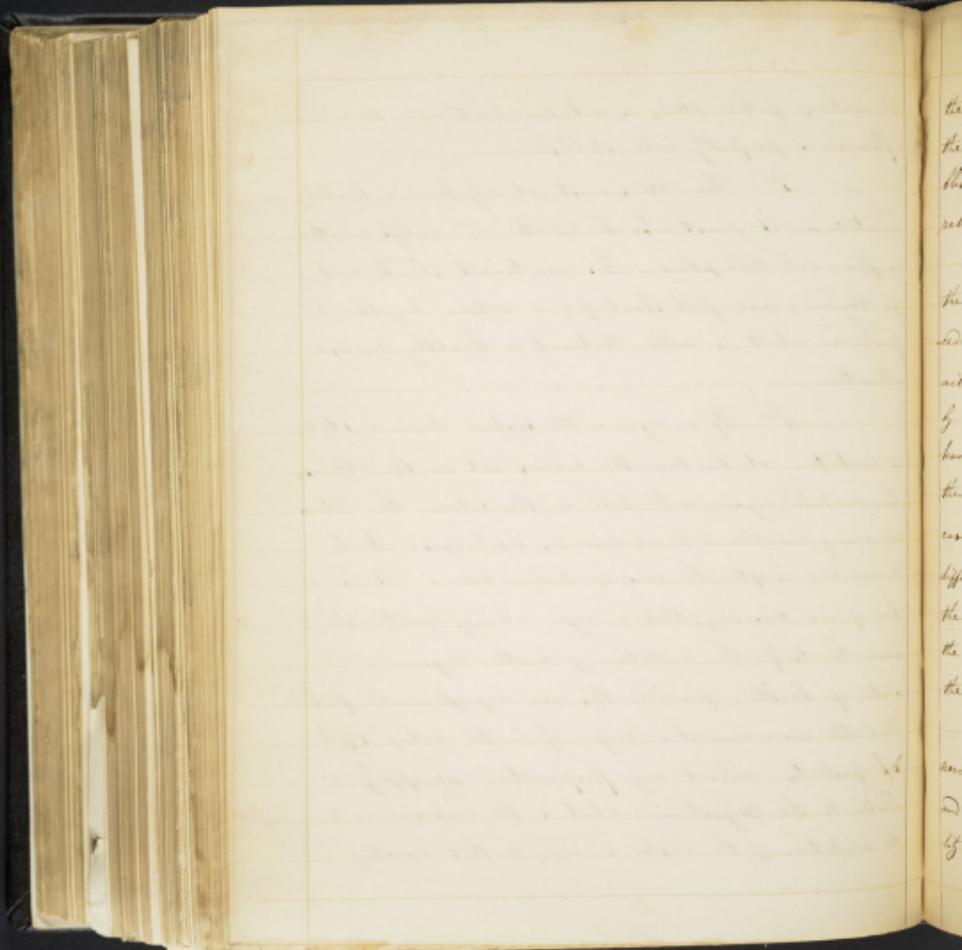
2^o The ovaries must be in a natural condition - If diseased or wanting, the Uterus will not perform its functions - In what manner the ovaries influence



the action of the Uterus is not known; though their influence is perfectly well established.

3^o The uterus must not only be in a healthy condition - it must also be excited, and unless excited no flow will take place - This excitement should not go beyond, nor fall short of, a certain length to produce what is called Natural or healthy menstruation.

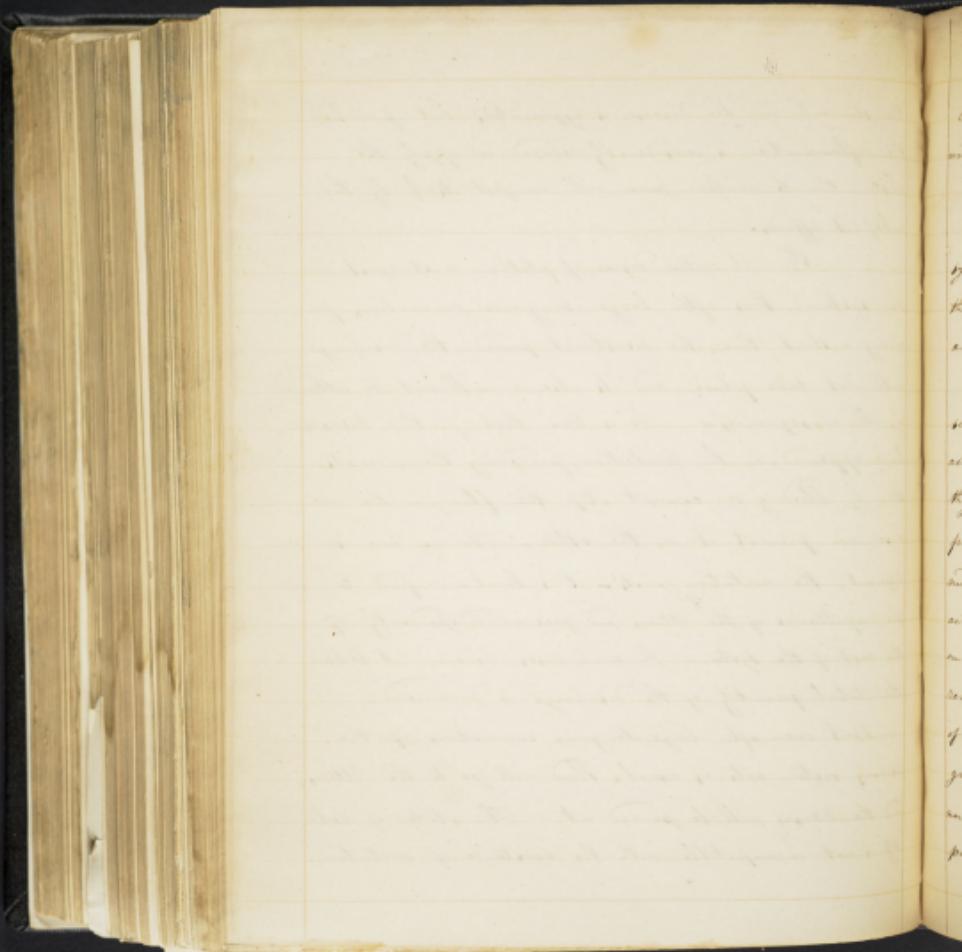
4^o If an organ in the system be in a state of irritation at the time the ovaries act on the uterus, the irritated organ will take on the action, the uterus remaining inactive - hence ovarian discharges - Such a condition is often the cause of Amenorrhoea - It is a law of our economy, that an organ, already excited, should now to itself the irritation of another organ in a state of health, provided this new impression be feebler than the more ancient - e.g. If in the active state of gestation without any preparation we apply a blister to the Spigastrium, what is the consequence? the irritation of the bladder is added to that existing in



the stomach and the disease is aggravated; but if when the inflammation is considerably reduced, we apply the blisters, then its rubefacient power will manifest itself by the relief it affords.

3^o. A certain degree of plethora must exist in the system; thus after large sanguine evacuations preceding a short time the menstrual period, the discharge will not take place, and its absence will not be attended by ill consequences - It is true that if the menses have appeared, or the irritation preceding them exists; then by bleeding we cannot stop the flow in the one case nor prevent it in the other - The case here is different, the irritation exists - it is locally confined to the capillaries of the uterus and goes on independently of the rest of the system - In such cases, however, I believe the total quantity of the discharge is diminished -

But even after large sanguine evacuations if the nervous system acts as usual, blood will go to the uterus & the menses will be poured out - The state of debility is not incompatible with the existence of irritation.

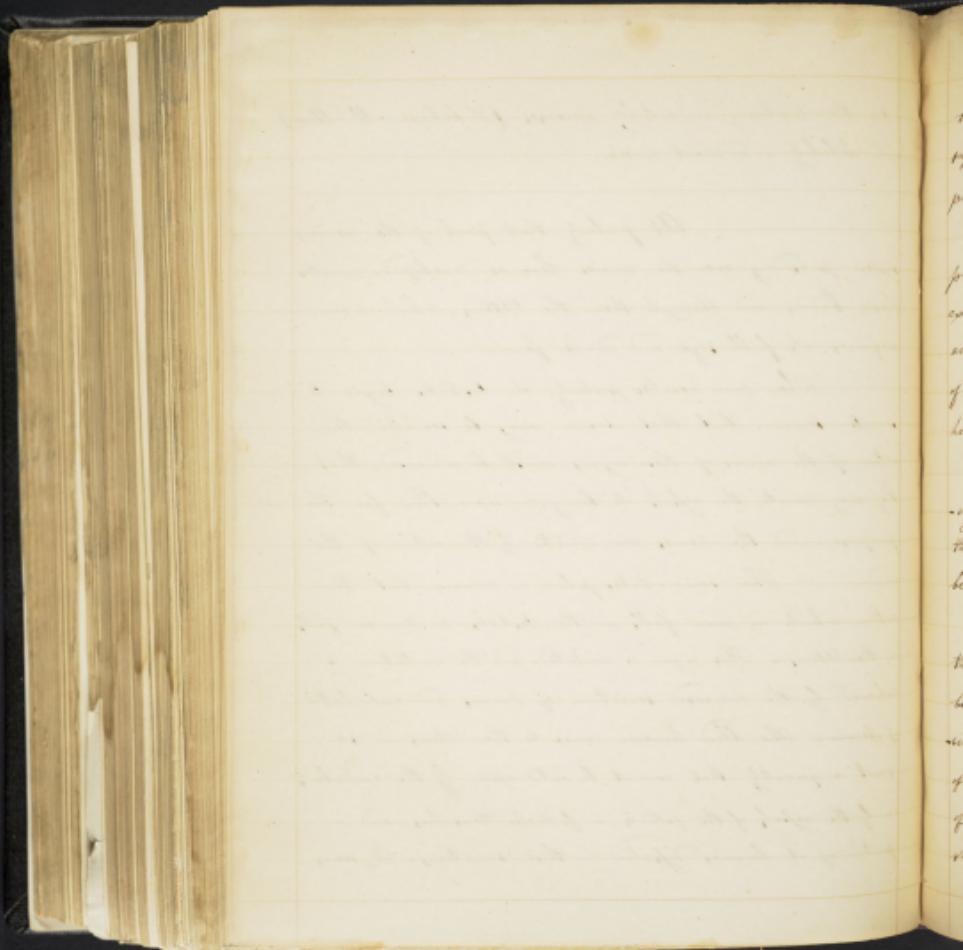


On the contrary irritability increases (I believe all along) with debility in a direct ratio.

At puberty that part of the nervous system presiding over the ovaries becomes developed, exerts these bodies and through them the Uterus, which now acquires its full size and adult form.

When man reaches puberty, the testicles begin to secrete semen; but that semen may be secreted, the action of the nerves of the organs must be increased, that they may excrete the vessels to bring on more blood for the purpose - and the nerves are excited by the action of the mind.

The same takes place in woman - but the action which in man falls on the testicles in woman falls on the Uterus - This organ is irritated - and the irritation is relieved by the increased secretion of menses and exhalation of semen - The blood however comes to the Uterus in so great a quantity that cannot be acted upon by the exhalation of the vessels of the follicles, or follicles themselves, and a portion of it becomes deposited in these secretions - It seems

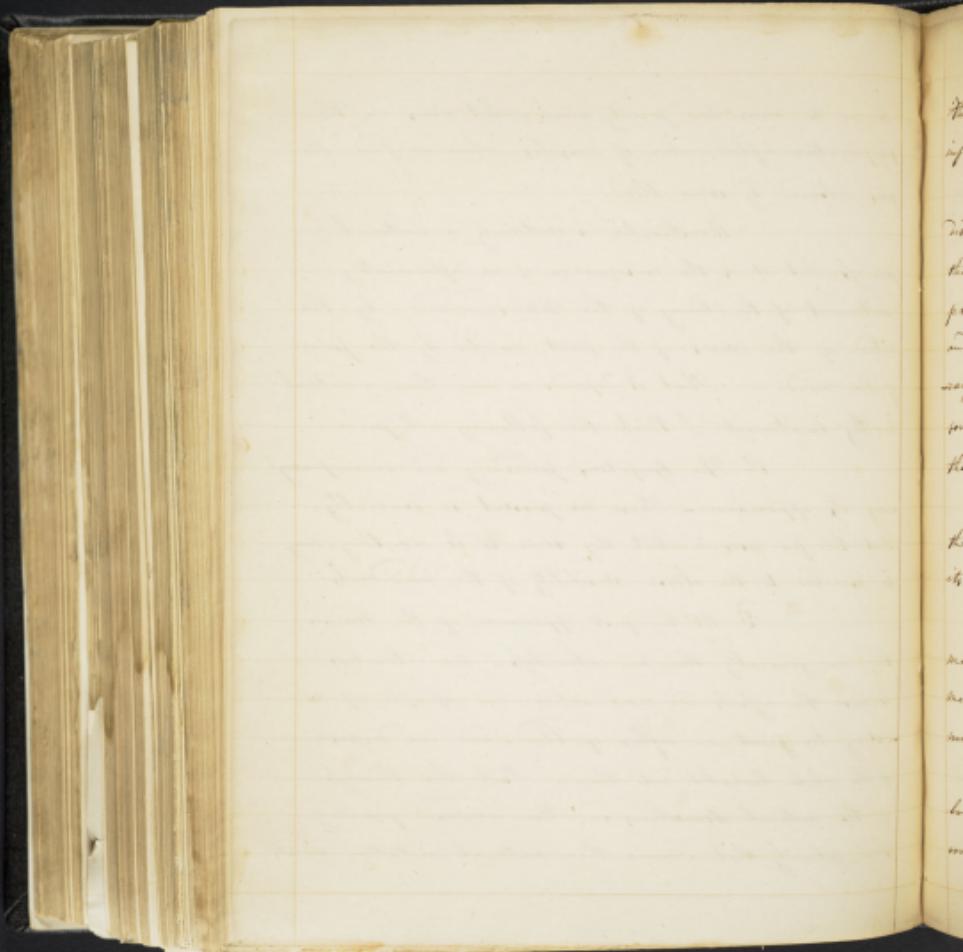


to me to occur here pretty much, what occurs in the suppulsive inflammation of muscles, where we find the pus coloured by some blood.

Menstruation is certainly a natural process; but it is the consequence of an inflammatory excitement of the lining of the Uterus, induced by the action of the nerves of the part, excited by the power of the mind. That it depends on more than a natural healthy excitement I think the following will prove.

1st The symptoms preceding and accompanying its appearance - These are present so generally, that the few cases, in which they seem to be wanting, may be ascribed to the obtuse sensibility of the individuals -

2^d At the first appearance of the Menses, they are generally thin and colourless - the colourless because the vessels are more active and capable of resisting too great an influx of Blood - and can dispose of the whole brought into them - But the thinness of the natural secretion, and their increased quantity show plainly, that a more than natural irritation exists.



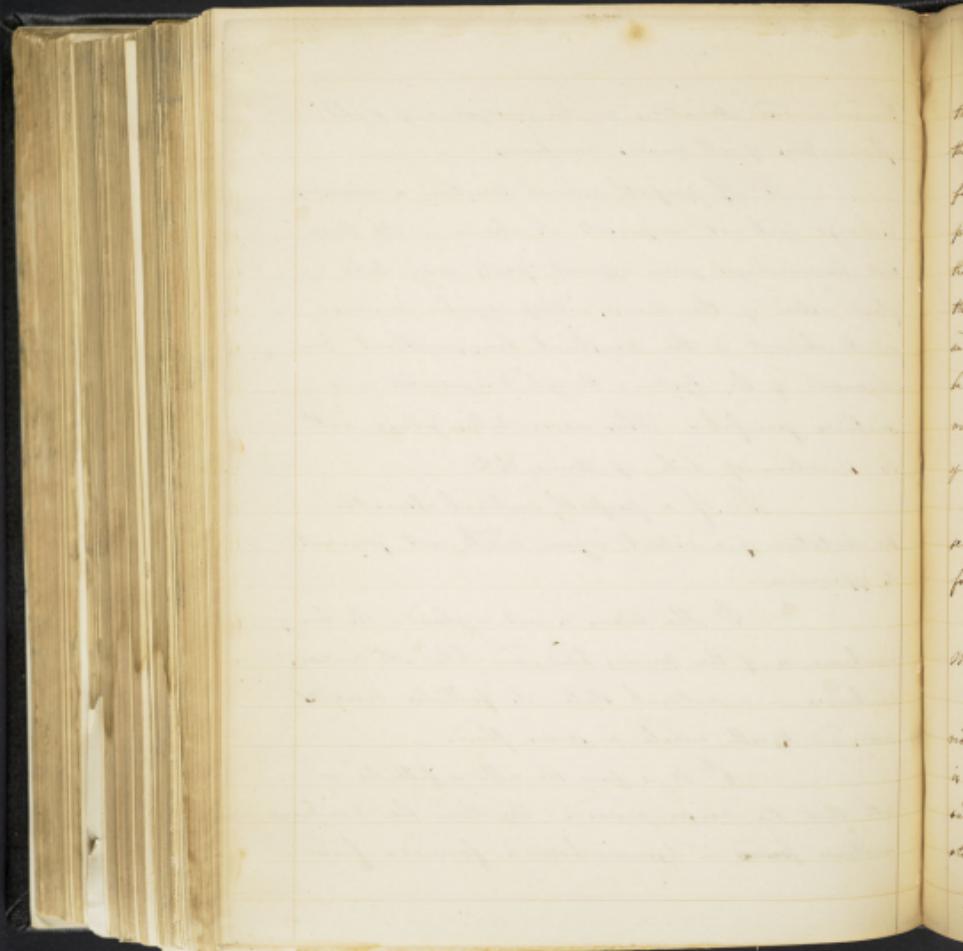
Few and increased secretions are the consequence of slight inflammations of all mucous membranes.

B. If perfectly natural secretion a cicarious discharge could not compensate its absence - We know that haemorrhages from different parts may take place instead of the menses, keep regular periods, and be obedient to the menstrual laws, without derangement of the system, though disagreeable and sometimes painful - This never takes place with the secretion of bile, of urine &c &c

C. If a perfectly natural secretion the irritation of a distant organ would not prevent its appearance -

D. The Uterus is not a gland - Its lining membrane is of the mucous kind, and like all mucous membranes, in a natural state, its follicles secrete mucus and its villi excrete a serous fluid.

E. It is from the villi or follicles on both that the menses proceed. By them the membrane sometimes forced in dysmenorrhoea is formed - from



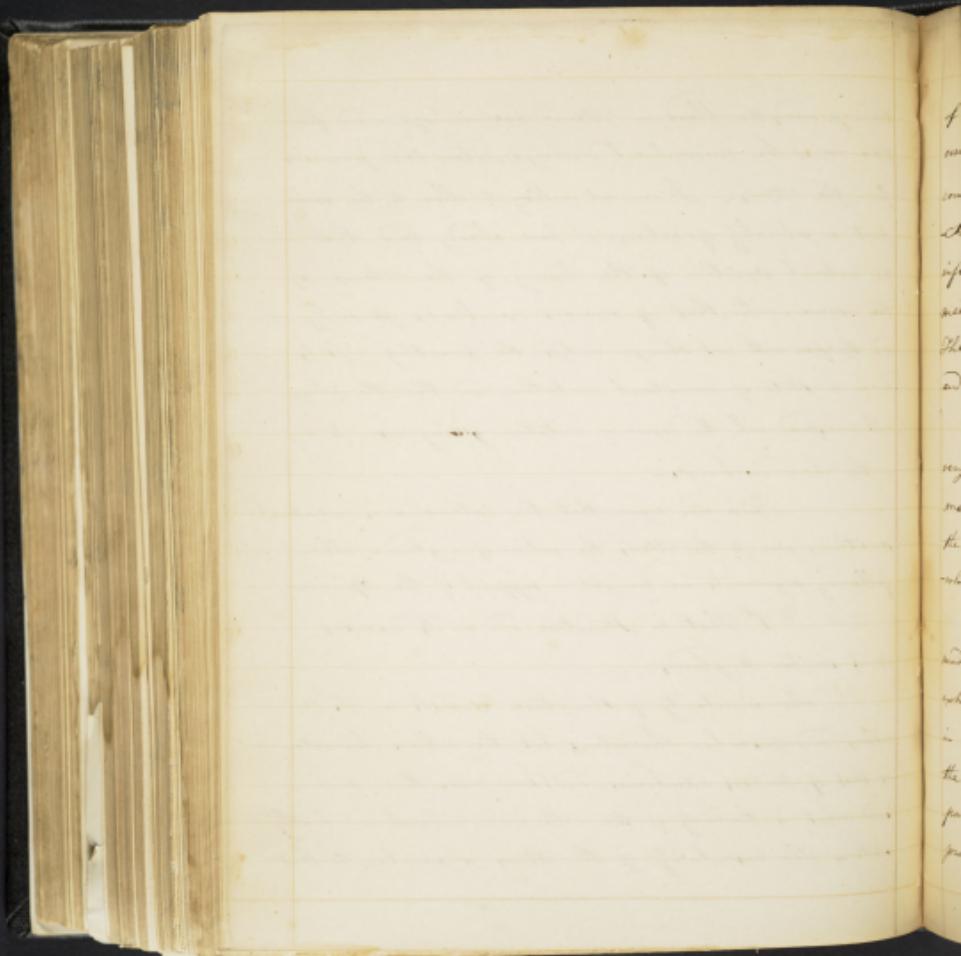
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then proceeds the blood in Uterine haemorrhage - and from
then comes the leucorrhœal discharge, when this proceeds
from the Uterus - I am not willing to allow to the same
part a plurality of actions - I have already said that
the natural secretion of the lining of the Uterus is
the same with that of mucous membranes generally
and therefore will not change unless the secreting vessels
be in a state of unnatural irritation and then the change
will correspond with the degree of irritation, giving rise to any
of the above discharges -

Those who argue that the catamenia is a natural
secretion, give to the Uterus the action of a gland - The
following arguments are brought in support of the opinion

Ist That in Structure and in its diseases
it is similar to glands

The similarity of structure consists in its
villous and vascular character, but the villous character
is that of mucous membranes, and I have more than once
said what is the duty of the villi in a natural and healthy
state - The vascularity of the Uterus is similar to that

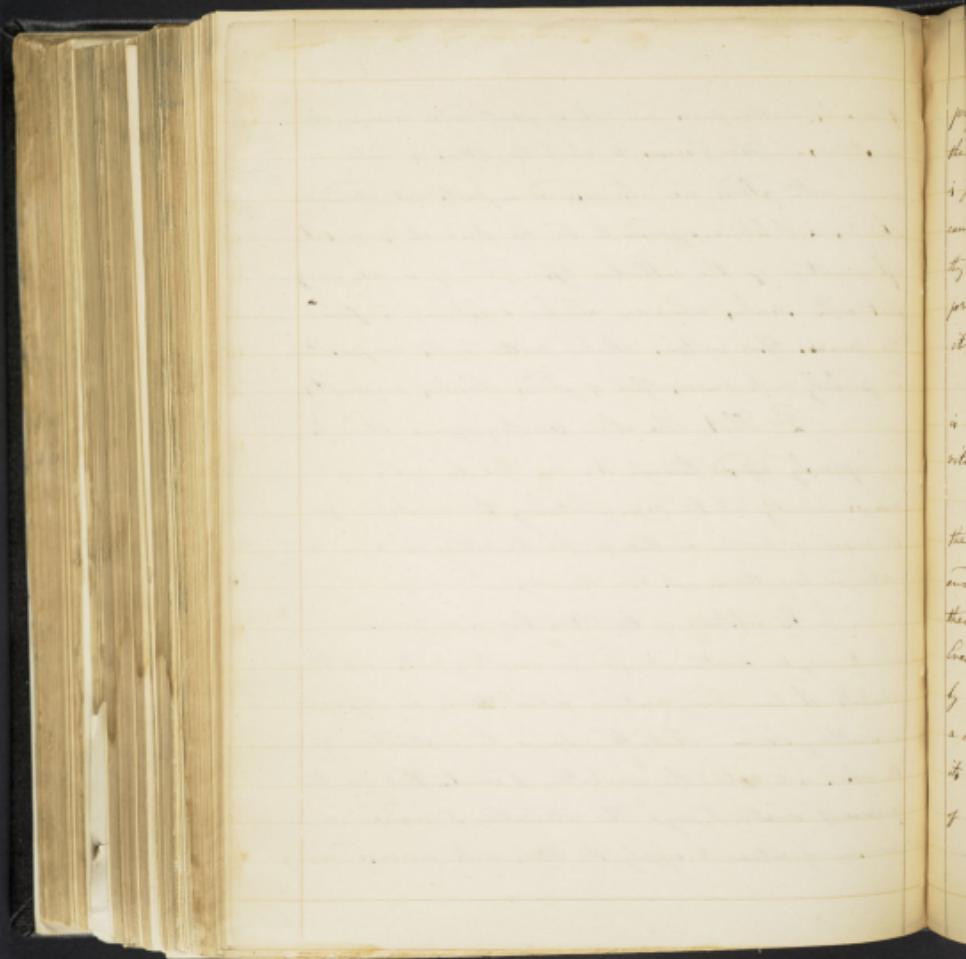


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females in other parts, and not so great under common circumstances. The diseases, to which the Uterus is liable in common with glands, are also observed in parts not glandular. Scirrhous is, I believe, supposed to be the product of a sub-inflammation of the cellular tissue; and if so, we may meet with scirrhus wherever cellular substance is found. The mucous tissue contains cellular matter in its composition and probably in the mucous tissue of glands scirrhus originally.

P. That like other secretory organs blood is very copiously diffused through it, and that the vessels are arranged evidently with the design of retarding the circulation for the purpose of secretion and that for this the arteries are larger, more dilated and have thinner walls than the veins.

In the substance of the Uterus there is no provision made to carry on secretion, we find no excretory ducts - and the vessels I have already mentioned, several times, are engaged in something else - That the design in the construction of the vessels is to retard the circulation I admit that for the purpose of secretion I deny - The retardation I consider a provision of nature to supply the Uterus with increase during

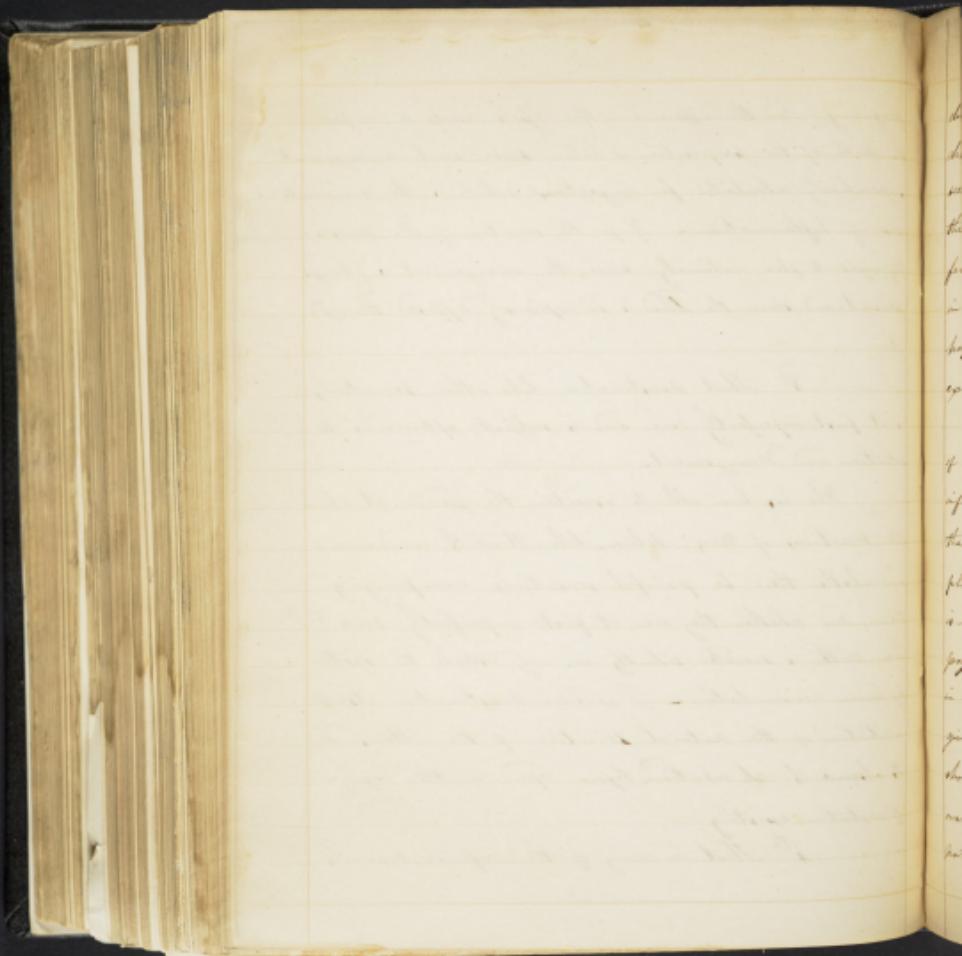


pregnancy - And the difference in the effects seems to confirm the truth of the proposition I hold - since such arrangement is peculiarly calculated for congesting, which is the immediate cause of inflammation - If for the secretion of the Menses to right to flow continually, since the arrangement is always present and since the Blood is so copiously diffused through its -

3^d. That menstruation like other secretions is at first imperfectly done and is subject afterwards to irritation and derangement -

He has been able to ascertain the period at which the secretions of tears, saliva, bile, urine & commence; and whether there be painful sensations accompanying them; and whether they are at first imperfectly done? Cow milk is secreted silently and only disturbs the system by undue accumulation - I consider menstruation itself a irritation of the natural secretion of the Uterus, and its absence & I mentioned before depend on the degree of irritation existing -

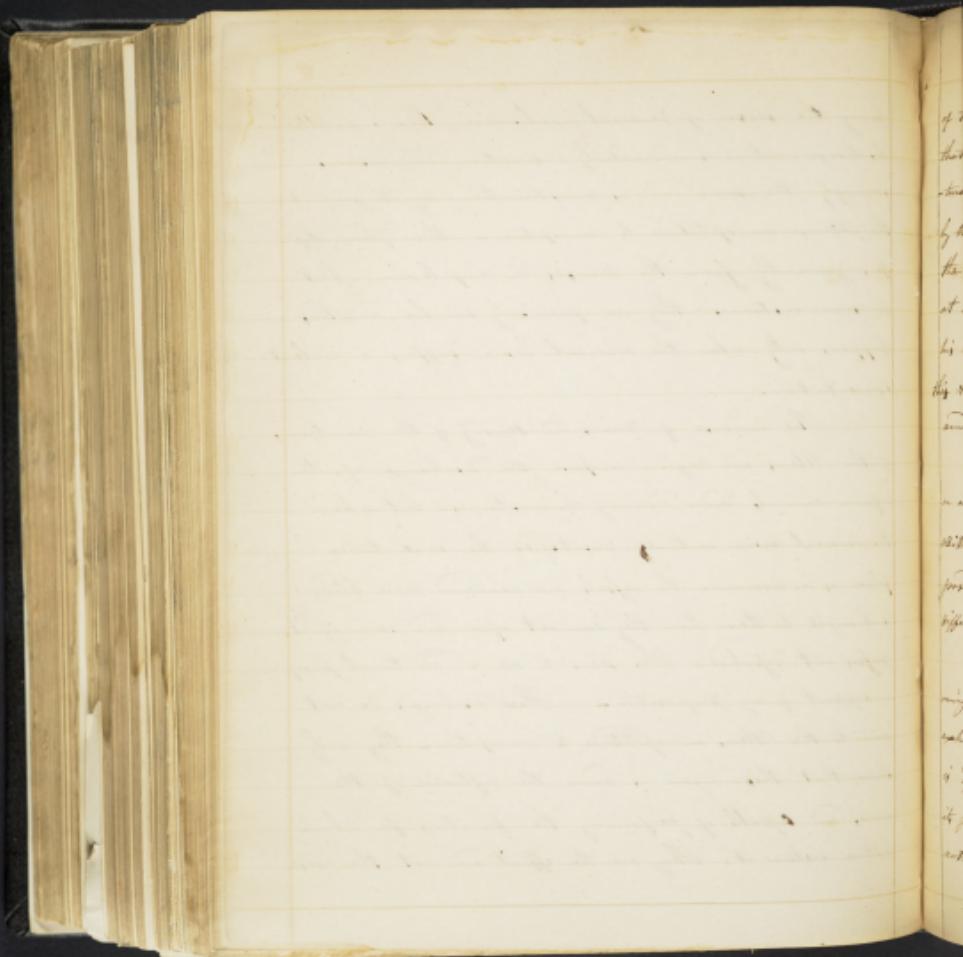
4th. That in many of the inferior animals



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during the season of menstrual incalculance, there is an uterine discharge, which is undoubtedly a secretion and answers
seemingly the same end as menstruation: viz. to give to
the Uterus an aptitude to conception - this fluid dif-
fers generally from the menses in composition; but
in some instances they are precisely similar, and this
happens only when the sensual desire suffers a violent
exacerbation.

The increase of Density and Thickness of the Membranes
of the Uterus and vagina compose the Discharge of the
inferior animals under ordinary circumstances - but when
the sensual desire continues unsatisfied the same takes
place as in women - the vessels are weakened, more blood
is brought to them than they can act upon and some of it
passes out displaced - This seems to me an additional proof
in support of my proposition - These discharges do not
give to the Uterus an aptitude to conception - they only
show that this organ is under the influence of the
vitals and capable of performing the functions for which
nature destined it. They are the effect and not the cause

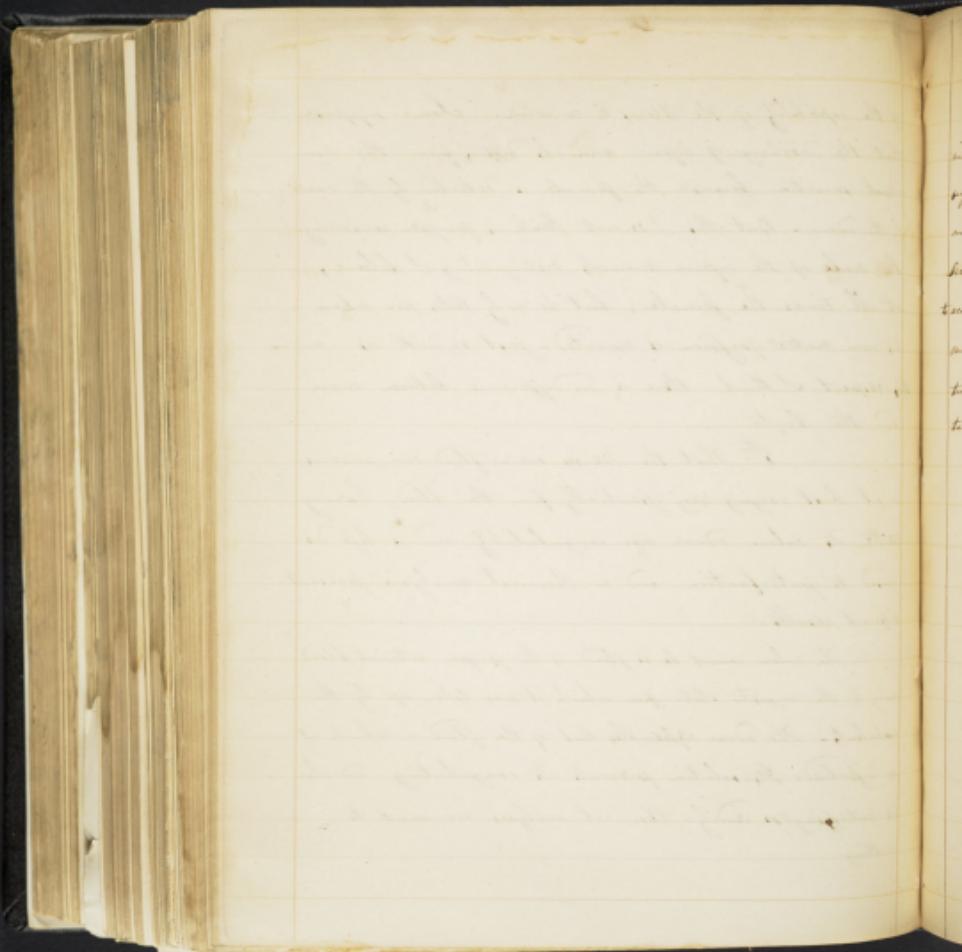


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of the capability of the Utens to conceive. Some suppose that the discharge of inferior animals differing from the sexual secretion because the female is detected by the male by the smell - But this I do not think is proper reasoning - the male of the inferior animals distinguish, I believe, at all times the female; but he only takes her when his own erotic passion is excited - just so with us - and in this respect, I think, there is no difference between man and the brute.

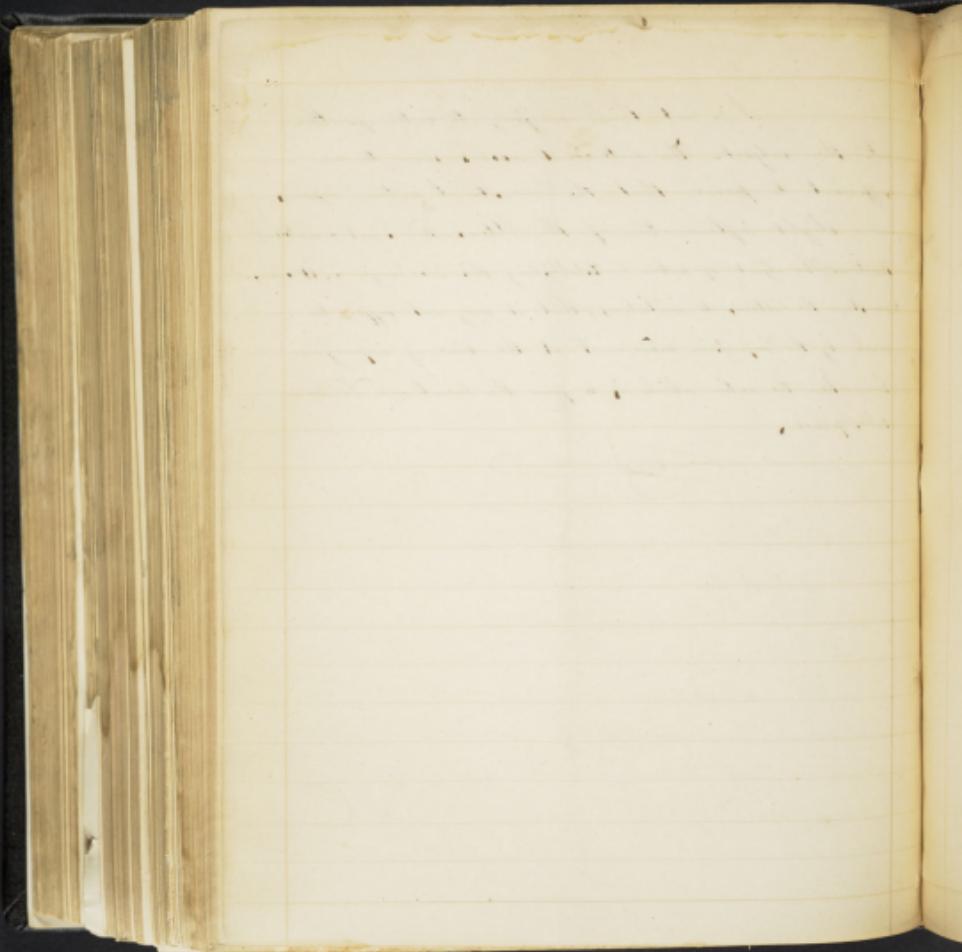
5th. That the Menstruum are a fluid *in* genesis or at least varying very essentially from the Blood, having with its colour, odour nor coagulability and is less disposed to putrefaction - and on Chemical analysis present different results.

The colour cannot be so fluid as the proper arterial blood owing to the coagulated state from which it was taken up by the coagulants - The colour resembles that of the fluid in which it is deposited - Its solution prevents its coagulating - and also its putrefying so readily - Chemical analyses are next to nothing.



I do not think necessary to enter further
into the subject - The antecedent reasons seem to me
sufficient to prove that the menstrual action depends
on a slight inflammation of the Uterus and is not a natural
function. The object of nature in establishing this discharge is, it seems,
to restrain the Uterus from inflating, that it may not suffer too
much by the impression made on it at the time of impregna-
tion, when the action which is to form the Membrana Viscidum
takes place.

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